

Message Text

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TAGS: NATO, CH, VM

SUBJECT: SINO-VIETNAMESE TENSION --THE PERSPECTIVE FROM
PEKING

REF: USNATO 6843

1. MISSION MAY DRAW UPON THE FOLLOWING ANALYSIS AS
APPROPRIATE.

2. BEGIN TEXT:

IN ITS DISPUTE WITH HANOI, PEKING IS MOTIVATED PRIMARILY
BY ITS CONCERN OVER VIETNAM'S AMBITIONS IN THE AREA AND THE
GROWING CLOSENESS BETWEEN VIETNAM AND THE SOVIET UNION.
THESE CONSIDERATIONS HAVE INTENSIFIED CHINA'S PERCEPTION
THAT IT IS THREATENED WITH ENCIRCLEMENT. TO BLUNT VIET-
NAMESE AMBITIONS, PEKING HAS SUPPORTED CAMBODIA AND HAS ALSO
PURSUED ITS QUARREL WITH HANOI BY ECONOMIC, DIPLOMATIC, AND
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PROPAGANDA MEANS.

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3. NEVERTHELESS, CHINA PROBABLY WILL NOT:

--ATTACK VIETNAM, AN ACTION THAT WOULD RISK SOVIET INTER-

VENTION (CHINA MAY RATTLE ITS SABER TO DIVERT VIETNAMESE TROOPS FROM CAMBODIA);

--COMMIT TROOPS TO THE DEFENSE OF CAMBODIA, ALTHOUGH IT MAY INCREASE AID AND THE NUMBER OF MILITARY AND TECHNICAL ADVISORS;

--SEVER DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH HANOI; AFTER ALL, CHINA HAS MAINTAINED STATE RELATIONS EVEN WITH THE SOVIET UNION.

4. ON THE OTHER HAND, CHINA PROBABLY WILL:

--CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN TIES WITH THE ASEAN COUNTRIES IN AN ATTEMPT TO CONTAIN VIETNAM AND THUS LIMIT THE SPREAD OF HANOI'S AND MOSCOW'S INFLUENCE IN THE AREA;

--STEP UP EFFORTS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH ALL FRIENDLY COUNTRIES USEFUL AGAINST THE USSR;

--INCREASE EFFORTS TO MODERNIZE ITS DEFENSE BY BUYING MILITARY AND INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGY FROM THE WEST AND JAPAN.

5. CHINA'S VIEW OF VIETNAM

CHINA IS ALARMED BY WHAT IT REGARDS AS HANOI'S DESIRE TO ESTABLISH "REGIONAL HEGEMONY" OVER INDOCHINA, AS EVI-
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DENCED BY VIETNAMESE ACTIONS IN LAOS AND TOWARD CAMBODIA. PEKING'S VIEW IS COLORED, MOREOVER, BY INDIGNATION AND FRUSTRATION, THE CHINESE CLAIM THAT THEY HAVE GIVEN VIETNAM MORE THAN 10 BILLION DOLLARS OF MILITARY AND ECONOMIC AID (OUR BEST INFORMATION INDICATES 5 BILLION DOLLARS) SINCE THE EARLY 1950S. YET, PEKING SEES HANOI CONTINUING TO PURSUE POLICIES SURE TO ANGER CHINA.

6. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PEKING AND HANOI LONG SIMMERED BELOW THE SURFACE, BUT THEY ERUPTED INTO OPEN HOSTILITY AFTER THE ALLEGED MISTREATMENT AND EXODUS OF ETHNIC CHINESE FROM VIETNAM. PEKING RESPONDED FIRST BY MAKING POLEMICAL ATTACKS, THEN BY CLOSING VIETNAM'S CONSULATES IN CHINA, AND MOST RECENTLY BY CUTTING OFF AID ENTIRELY.

7. CHINA'S EFFORTS TO PREVENT HANOI'S SUBVERSION OF CAMBODIA

PEKING IS CONCERNED THAT HANOI WILL FORCE CAMBODIA TO BECOME A SATELLITE LIKE LAOS, EITHER THROUGH DIRECT ATTACK

OR THROUGH SUPPORT TO AN ALTERNATIVE CAMBODIAN LEADERSHIP

SYMPATHETIC TO VIETNAM. TO BLOCK THIS ATTEMPT, PEKING SINCE 1975 HAS EXPRESSED STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE POL POT LEADERSHIP, DESPITE PRIVATE COMMENTS COMPLAINING OF ITS EXTREME POLICIES. IN ADDITION TO POLITICAL SUPPORT, PEKING HAS PROVIDED TECHNICIANS AND SOME MILITARY AID, INCLUDING LONG-RANGE ARTILLERY PIECES WHICH HAVE ENABLED THE CAMBODIANS TO INFLICT HEAVY DAMAGE ON THE VIETNAMESE IN THE BORDER FIGHTING.

8. WHEN THE CAMBODIAN-VIETNAMESE CONFLICT INTENSIFIED LATE LAST YEAR, PEKING SHOWED SYMPATHY FOR CAMBODIA BUT AVOIDED CRITICISM OF HANOI; THIS TACTIC WAS PRESUMABLY DESIGNED NOT TO DRIVE HANOI FURTHER TOWARD MOSCOW. BUT BY LATE APRIL, PEKING APPARENTLY DECIDED THAT VIETNAM
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WAS IRREVOCABLY SET ON AN ANTI-CHINESE PATH.

9. CHINA HAS DIRECTED ITS PUBLIC FIRE MOSTLY AT HANOI'S TREATMENT OF ETHNIC CHINESE. THE LARGER PURPOSE OF THE CRITICISM, HOWEVER, IS TO DISCOURAGE VIETNAM'S PERCEIVED EFFORT TO SUBDUE CAMBODIA AND TO CAUSE HANOI TO HAVE SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH MOSCOW. HOWEVER, HANOI HAS NOT BOWED TO THIS PRESSURE. ON THE CONTRARY--TO THE HEIGHTENED ANGER OF CHINA--IN JUNE IT STEPPED-UP ITS MILITARY EFFORT AGAINST CAMBODIA AND APPEARED TO MOVE EVEN CLOSER TO MOSCOW.

10. EVACUATION OF ETHNIC CHINESE FROM VIETNAM

WHEN THE ETHNIC CHINESE IN VIETNAM BEGAN TO FLEE IN APRIL (OVER 140,000 HAVE CROSSED INTO CHINA NOW), THE PRC ANNOUNCED PLANS TO EVACUATE THEM AND IN JUNE SENT TWO PASSENGER SHIPS FOR THEM. DIFFERENCES IMMEDIATELY AROSE OVER EVACUATION PROCEDURES, HOWEVER, THE TWO SHIPS HAVE BEEN WAITING OFF THE COAST OF VIETNAM FOR THREE WEEKS.

11. THE TALKS REMAIN DEADLOCKED; CHINA INSISTS THAT IT, NOT VIETNAM, WILL DECIDE WHO WILL BE EVACUATED. THE CHINESE WILL BE CAREFUL HOW HARD THEY PRESS THEIR SUPPORT FOR THESE OVERSEAS CHINESE IN ORDER NOT TO SCARE THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN GOVERNMENTS WHICH ARE SENSITIVE ABOUT THEIR OWN LARGE CHINESE MINORITIES.

12. OTHER AREAS OF TENSION

LAND BORDER. THERE HAVE BEEN NO MAJOR BORDER DISAGREEMENTS

BETWEEN CHINA AND VIETNAM, BUT HANOI NOW CONTENTS THAT
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CHINA ILLEGALLY CLAIMS SMALL AREAS ON THE BORDER. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF SUBSTANTIAL MILITARY BUILD-UP ON EITHER SIDE OF THE BORDER, BUT BOTH SIDES HAVE TAKEN STEPS TO IMPROVE SURVEILLANCE AND WARNING. HOWEVER, THERE HAVE BEEN REPEATED (THOUGH UNCONFIRMED) REPORTS OF LOW-LEVEL CLASHES ALONG THE BORDER. RECENTLY, THERE HAVE BEEN MINOR INCIDENTS AS ETHNIC CHINESE FLED TO CHINA.

13. DISPUTED ISLANDS. CHINA ASSERTED ITS CLAIM TO THE PARACELS IN 1974 BY FORCEFULLY DISPLACING THE SMALL SOUTH VIETNAMESE GARRISON THERE, AN ACTION RESENTED BY HANOI. DESPITE HONG KONG PRESS REPORTS THAT VIETNAM MAY TRY TO RETAKE THESE ISLANDS, AND WE HAVE NO INDICATION THAT EITHER SIDE INTENDS TO RESORT TO FORCE.

14. CHINA ALSO CLAIMS THE SPRATLY ISLANDS FARTHER TO THE SOUTH, SOME OF WHICH ARE HELD BY VIETNAM, BUT PEKING IS UNLIKELY TO TRY TO ENFORCE THIS CLAIM AT PRESENT. PEKING PROBABLY REALIZES THAT THE VIETNAMESE ARE WELL PREPARED TO DEFEND THE ISLANDS THEY OCCUPY. CHINA MAY ALSO BE CONCERNED OVER ITS RELATIONS WITH THE PHILIPPINES, WHICH ALSO CLAIMS THE ISLANDS AND HOLDS SOME OF THEM. (TAIWAN IS ANOTHER CLAIMANT WITH A MILITARY PRESENCE ON ONE ISLAND THERE.)

15. LAOS. PEKING'S CONCERN ABOUT THE VIETNAMESE AND SOVIET ROLE IN LAOS MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO A REPORTED RECENT DECISION TO PULL ITS ROAD-BUILDING TROOPS OUT OF THE NORTHERN PART OF LAOS. END TEXT.

16. WE WOULD APPRECIATE COMMENTS ON THIS ANALYSIS FROM THE ALLIES.

CHRISTOPHER

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